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ABSTRACT

A longitudinal study of the relative influence of wives and husbands in deciding whether a wife should work was conducted in Seattle, Washington. A sample of 378 married couples of similar socioeconomic status (SES) was interviewed in 1977, and of these, 349 couples were interviewed a year later. The husbands' perceptions of the relative influence of wives and husbands was the unit of analysis, or dependent variable, and path analysis was used. The influence of wives was positively related to their income, which was interpreted to mean that higher income gives wives more independence and more alternatives, thus giving them more influence in marital decision-making. The influence of husbands was also negatively related to their income, which was interpreted to mean that, as the SES of husbands (as indicated by their income) rises, they are exposed to, and are more likely to adhere to, egalitarian standards. The follow-up study indicated that the incomes of husbands and wives in 1977 had a greater effect on wives' influence in 1978 than did the incomes in 1977, which was interpreted as support for a "carry over" model what states that patterns of spousal influence formed early in marriage have staying power. (IM)

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THE PROCESS OF MARITAL INFLUENCE OVER TIME: THE CASE OF WIVES' EMPLOYMENT DECISION-MAKING*

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THE PROCESS OF MARITAL INFLUENCE OVER TIME: THE CASE OF WIVES' EMPLOYMENT DECISION-MAKING

INTRODUCTION

The concept of marital and family power is perhaps one of the most intriguing, and yet methodologically complex areas in family research. The majority of studies dealing with power in a marital setting have equated decision-making with power, utilized survey interviews, relied solely on wife's response regarding who makes what decision, and have frequently summed a number of decision-making areas to arrive at an index of decision-making power. Clearly a number of methodological problems are inherent in these designs. Moreover, past research has failed to examine the dynamics of marital power within a longitudinal rather than cross-sectional framework. It is the latter point which is the major focus of the following analysis. Rather than explaining marital power within a cross-section, we attempt to understand the dynamics of marital power over time through the use of panel data. In addition, the focus is on one aspect of power--influence. Likewise, one decision-making area (wife's employment) is examined for families with young children present in the household. Finally, husbands' perceptions of influence is the unit of analysis. The primary purpose of this investigation is to apply and modify a theoretical model that attempts to explain marital influence over time.

Theoretical Background

An earlier analysis of the first wave of this data set revealed that influence in wives' employment decision-making was best interpreted from both David Heer's (1963) exchange theory, and Hyman Rodman's (1972) theory of resources in a cultural context (Rank, 1982). As wives' gained in resources (e.g. income, occupational prestige, education, employment status, fewer children) they tended to experience more influence over whether they should work or not. It was argued that the underlying process involved, was that as women acquire the

necessary skills and resources to become economically self-sufficient, they exert greater influence, while their husbands exert less influence. Thus, women are less economically dependent upon their husbands when they are employed, have higher status jobs, earn greater income, possess higher levels of education, and have fewer children. Husbands must reckon with the fact that as these conditions are met, their wives do indeed have greater access to marital alternatives: In these cases, husbands are more willing to concede, while wives are more willing to acquire decision-making influence with respect to employment. Other empirical studies have generated support for this position. Thus, employed wives have reported greater power than nonemployed wives in various North American and cross-cultural studies (Heer, 1958; Hoffman, 1958; Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Kandel and Lesser, 1972; Rodman, 1972; Bahr, 1974; First-Dilic, 1974). Likewise, wives without children (Heer, 1958; Blood and Wolfe, 1960; Michel,1967; Centers et al., 1971), or at low parity levels (Morris and Sison, 1974), tend to experience greater power in family decision-making.

On the other hand, it was demonstrated that husbands' resources tended to be negatively correlated with his influence. These correlations were explained in terms of Rodman's theory of resources in a cultural context. Thus, as husbands attain higher levels of income, occupational prestige, and education, it was argued that they come closer in contact with a set of egalitarian norms regarding spousal relations (which include wife's employment). In these cases, it was hypothesized that husbands are more willing to concede influence within the domain of wife's employment decision-making. Research has indicated some support for this postion. For example, Komarovsky's (1964) data indicate that higher social status is associated with less adherence to patriarchal authority among husbands in the United States. We would argue that as both wives and husbands rise in the socioeconomic structure, women become less economically dependent

upon their spouses, while men are socialized into an egalitarian ethic. Both contribute to gains in decision-making influence for women. However, the above explanation of influence is based upon a cross-sectional analysis. Might we expect to find a similar explanation in seeking to understand influence over multiple time periods? That is, should a wife's level of economic self-sufficiency, and a husbands exposure to egalitarian norms be positively correlated with wife's influence at two different time periods? Or, might a modified explanation be more suitable in dealing with decision-making influence longitudinally? These are the questions addressed in our analysis. Based upon earlier findings, we would expect wives' economic self-sufficiency, husbands' exposure to egalitarianism, and influence, to interact as diagrammed in figure 1. Thus, wife's economic self-sufficiency and husband's exposure to

[Figure 1 about here]

to egalitarianism at time 1 positively affects the amount of influence a wife has at time 1. Likewise these two variables (X1 and X2) are viewed as having a direct and indirect positive effect on wife's influence at time 2. Wife's influence at time 1 is viewed as positively affecting influence at time 2. The amount of influence at time 1 is hypothesized as having a positive effect on wife's economic self-sufficiency and husband's exposure to egalitarianism at time 2. Finally, wife's level of economic self-sufficiency and husband's exposure to egalitarianism at time 2 are viewed as having a direct positive effect on influence at time 2.

Conceptualization of Power

Clearly the concept of power is both complex and multi-dimensional as indicated by Hallenbeck (1966), Olson and Rabunsky (1972), and Scanzoni (1979). Yet too often in the past, research has both conceptualized and operationalized

family power as if it were synonomous with decision-making. In this analysis, power is coneptualized as consisting of three major components: 1) decision-making; 2) influence; and 3) authority. In the investigation to follow, the focus is only upon influence in a specific decision-making area. Influence, as Safilios-Rothschild (1970) has indicated, can be defined as "the degree to which formal or informal, overt or covert pressure exerted by the one spouse upon the other (or by one family member upon another) is successful in imposing that spouse's point of view about a pending decision, despite initial opposition" (540). This analysis addresses only one area of power, rather than equating influence with power.

Influence in Employment Decisions

As mentioned earlier, most studies of conjugal power have addressed decision-making in a number of areas, given them all equal weight, and then summed the indicators to arrive at an overall index of husband/wife power. This approach has several serious shortcomings. To score all decisions with an equal weight, assumes that these decisions are equally important for the reporting family member (Safilios-Rothschild, 1970) and that the decisions do in fact measure the same thing (Olson and Cromwell, 1975). Both of these assumptions are questionable.

Second, as Cromwell and Wieting (1975) report, a factor analysis utilizing data from five different studies of conjugal decision-making, indicated both an inconsistent and multi-dimensional nature with respect to various decision-making areas. As they write, "Summing individual items or individual item means and employing that composite score in data interpretation is highly questionable from a measurement point of view" (141).

Rather than dealing with a composite power score, the analysis presented here focuses on influence within one decision-making area--wife's employment. Certainly this is an important area in which marital power may be exercised, and as such merits an in-depth analysis. It would appear to be an even more crucial area of power, when young children are present (as is the case in this sample). Over the past 30 years, there as been a dramatic increase in the percentage of working women with young children. In 1950, only 12 percent of mothers with one or more children below the age of six were employed or looking for work. By 1980, this percentage had risen to 45 percent (Waite, 1981). As more women with young children enter, or attempt to enter the labor market, the concept of influence within this decision-making area becomes particularly relevent. For both dyad members, the influence each feels they have over mother's employment is likely to be an important dimension of overall marital power.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Respondents to the decision-making survey were drawn from the Seattle, Washington area in June, 1977. A total of 378 married couples were located through King County birth records. During April and May 1977, potential respondents were contacted indirectly, through the Director of the County Department of Public Health, to request their participation in a survey of contraceptive, childbearing, and female employment attitudes and behavior. Of the women who could be reached by mail and who responded to the letter of inquiry, 66 percent agreed to be contacted by the researcher. All couples had had a child during 1973, 1974, 1975, or 1976. Other restrictions were that the age of mothers was confined to the 26-36 age bracket, neither partner was sterilized, births were legitimate and not multiple, race of the child was white, the birth occurred in the Seattle metropolitan area, and parents resided in

Seattle at the time of the birth. Husbands and wives separately completed parallel questionaires. Respondents were then reinterviewed in June, 1978. Of the 378 original couples, 349 were reinterviewed. The following analysis is based only on those couples interviewed in both 1977 and 1978.

Regarding sample characteristics, respondents tended to have higher socio-economic status than the comparison population of Seattle. Dyad members were well educated, and family incomes tended to be somewhat higher than the comparison population. Mean age of husbands was 32.5 years, and 30.6 years for wives (in 1977). Couples had been married an average of 8 years, and the vast majority had been married only once.

Measurement of Variables

In order to measure wives' economic self-sufficiency, as well as husbands' exposure to egalitarian norms though socioeconomic status, wives' and husbands' incomes were used.[2] Income was coded into eight categories; 0, 1-4999, 5000-9999, 10,000-14,999, 15,000-19,999, 20,000-24,999, 25,000-29,999, and 30,000 or greater.

Regarding influence, husbands and wives were asked to self-report influence with respect to wife's employment decision-making. Preceding the employment question was the following statement: "Many couples talk things over before making important decisions,but for some decisions the husband has more influence and for other decisions the wife usually has more influence. In your family, which one of you has the most influence in making the following decision?" This was followed for husbands by: "Whether or not my wife should work outside the home." Response categories included, "I have almost all the influence," "I have moderately more influence than my wife does," "both of us have exactly equal influence," "wife has moderately more influence than I do," and "wife has almost all the

influence." Influence was thus measure on a scale of 1 (husband having all the influence) to 5 (wife having all the influence).

The unit of analysis in this investigation was husband's perceptions of influence in wives' employment decision-making. It was demonstrated in an earlier analysis, that for this data set, husbands' perceptions were probably a closer and more accurate representation of actual influence than were wives' perceptions of influence (Rank, 1982). Subsequently, we have chosen to focus on husbands' perceptions as our unit of analysis.

Data Analysis

A number of debates exist regarding the analysis of longitudinal data. As Pendleton et al. note, "Quite literally, the measurement of change and formation of longitudinal designs open a 'Pandora's Box' of dispute and controversy" (1973:458). Clearly,the variety of statistical techniques available to the researcher interested in analyzing longitudinal data offer various advantages and disadvantages. Keeping this in mind, path analysis was chosen as a suitable method for examining the effect of spousal income on influence at two different time periods. There are several important advantages with using path analysis. First, it enables the researcher to test the applicability of a theoretical design. As Kerlinger and Pedhauzer write, "one of the virtues of the method is that in order to apply it the researcher is required to make explicit the theoretical framework within which he operates" (1973:305). A second clear advantage of path analysis is the ability to examine a correlation between two variables in terms of direct, indirect, and spurious effects, as well as associations between variables. Thus, the relationships among several variables can be understood in a more dynamic fashion than multiple regression will allow. Finally, a third advantage is the ability to create a more parsimonious model through the deletion of paths. By eliminating paths, one is able to "tighten up" a particular theory so that it

may become more consistent with the data. All three of these advantages will be incorporated into the following analysis.

With respect to the statistical assumptions underlying path analysis, the linearity of husband's and wife's incomes, as well as husband's perception of influence were examined, resulting in no significant nonlinear relationships.[3] In addition, a direct examination of residuals indicated a lack of correlation among the error terms, thus fulfilling a second assumption of path analysis. Finally, our theory implies a recursive rather than nonrecursive path model, and therefore reciprocal causation is eliminated from the analysis.

RESULTS

Figure 2 illustrates (with path coefficients) the model that was discussed in figure 1 (correlation matrix in Appendex A). We find that wife's and husband's incomes positively affect the amount of influence a woman has regarding whether she should work or not (as hypothesized). Moreover, the amount of influence a woman has at time 1 strongly affects the amount of influence she has at time 2. However, wife's and husband's incomes at time 2 (as well as time 1) fail to have a statistically significant direct effect on influence at

[Figure 2 about here]

time 2.

Figure 3 slightly modifies figure 2 by leaving out the effect of X3 on X6. This enables us to examine the relationship between income at times 1 and 2 and influence at time 2, without washing out these effects by the inclusion of wife's influence at time 1. What we find is indeed a surprising result. Rather than X4 and X5 having a significant positive effect on X6, we find that X1 and X2 have the stronger effect on X6. Of course X1 and X4, as well as X2 and X5, are highly correlated with each other, but nevertheless, this model indicates

[Figure 3 about here]

that controlling for spousal incomes at times 1 and 2, earlier rather than later levels of income have the stronger effect on determining influence at a later date.

Figure 4 further reduces our original model by omitting wife's and husband's incomes at time 2. Once again, X1 and X2 have a positive effect on X3. Likewise, wife's influence at time 1 (X3) has a direct effect on her influence at time 2 (X4). Finally X1 and X2 are viewed as having both a direct and an indirect effect on X4. The direct effects of X1 and X2 on X4 are .04 and .09 respectively, while the indirect effects are .07 (.15x.49) and .11 (.22x.49), resulting in a total effect on X4 of .11 (X1) and .20 (X2).[3]

[Figure 4 about here]

In order to longitudinally understand influence within wives' employment decision-making, and perhaps in order to understand marital power in general, there is a need to develop a new model or theoretical framework, which we shall call the "carry over" model. It is argued that figure 4 is an approximate representation of the process of influence dynamics over time. In order to predict the extent of influence a wife has regarding the decision to work, one must be aware of previous levels of influence. However, at some point time, probably very early in a couple's marital history (or perhaps premaritally), there is no level of previous influence (as in the case of our 1977 sample). At this stage, the extent of the wife's economic self-sufficiency, and the extent of the husband's exposure to egalitarian norms come into play. These factors positively effect the amount of influence the wife (and conversely the husband) has. The greater the wife's ability to support herself independently of her husband, the greater the availability of marital alternatives. This in turn, provides her (both consciously and unconsciously) with a viable bargaining

chip in increasing her influence over employment decision-making. Likewise, husband's socioeconomic status at this initial stage has a positive effect on wife's influence as well. The higher the husband's SES, the greater the likelihood that he has been exposed and adhers to a more egalitarian set of beliefs regarding male/female relations, which results in his spouse accruing greater influence.

We would argue that this initial stage is paramount in understanding influence at a later date. There appears to be a carry over effect of influence at time 1 on influence at time 2. There is also a carry over effect of SES (as measured by income) at time 1 on influence at time 2. This effect is both indirect (through SES affecting influence at time 1 which in turn affects influence at time 2) and direct. The direct effect is somewhat weaker than the indirect effect. We would argue that the reason for the slight direct effect of husband's and wife's incomes on influence at time 2 is the following: A husband has formed his ideas about spousal relations based on previous exposure to egalitarian norms. These feeling are developed early on and are slow to change--even in light of changes in SES. Thus, husband's previous level of SES continues to have a direct effect on current levels of influence. It is argued that the process is similar for wives. That is, a wife tends to form her ideas about how economically self-sufficient she is early in the marriage. These ideas may be slow to change, and hence continue to effect influence in the future.

An interesting component of the carry over model, is the absence of wives' and husbands' current incomes (or SES) in determining current levels of influence. We are arguing that the reason current levels of SES are perhaps not as important as previous levels of SES in predicting influence, is that the early stage of marriage, which often represents the period when guidelines

and rules are established, is foundamental in determing how future patterns of interaction occur. Thus it is the early rather than the later levels of SES which are critical in predicting influence at a later time period. This idea is a radical departure from the existing theoretical frameworks dealing with marital power. However, as stated earlier, previous theories have focused on the cross-section rather than the changing dynamics of power. It may be that such theories are in need of modification when dealing with panel data. Thus, we are suggesting that to predict the current levels of influence in wives' employment decision-making, one needs to focus on the levels of influence established early in the couple's marital career, and that these early levels of influence are affected by spousal levels of SES. Obviously the longer a couple is married, the less effect this early stage will have on current levels of influence. However, it may be that even for long-term couples, there is a carry over effect from the rules and guidelines that were established during the early years of marriage, to the current patterns of behavior, interaction, and influence.

DISCUSSION

It is necessary to qualify our results, by noting several shortcomings of the preceeding analysis. First, the time span under consideration is only one year (1977 to 1978). It may be that the carry over model is not as applicable for longer time intervals. Second, we have dealt with only two periods of time. If one were to consider, for example, five waves of data, would the process be similar? Unfortunately we are unable to answer this question. It must also be noted that other variables outside of our model are clearly affecting influence (as indicated by the residual terms). Finally the generalizability of our sample is limited to a major metropolitan area.

Keeping these shortcomings in mind, the carry over model does represent a first step in attempting to understand the process of influence over time in a decision-making area. Previous studies have explained marital power from a static, cross-sectional approach. When one considers power as a dynamic quality, new models are perhaps needed to offer insight into the process. As we have argued, it may be that the past, rather than the present, offers greater predictability and understanding of current levels of conjugal influence. Subsequently, socioeconomic status helps to establish levels of influence early in marriage, and these levels then carry over into the future. This is not to suggest that marital change is nonexistent. However, we are suggesting that the early transition to marriage is extremely important in understanding later interaction. Indeed, the seeds of the future are sown in the past.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Education and occupational prestige were not used in this analysis. Information on education was only gathered in 1977. With respect to occupational prestige, the measurement of occupation differed from 1977 to 1978, rendering it unsuitable for longitudinal analysis. Because we were interested in a consistent measure of SES, income was chosen.

[2]The following formula was used to examine the linearity among relationships:

$$F = \frac{(R^2 \text{ with dummy variables} - R^2 \text{ with original variable})/(k-1)}{(1-R^2 \text{ with dummy variables})/(N-k-1)}$$

where k is the number of dummy variables.

[3]While the direct effects of X1 and X2 on X4 are not statistically significant, the total effects of X1 and X2 are sizeable. Consequently, the direct effects of income were left in the model.

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FIGURE 1. Theoretical Model of Marital Influence

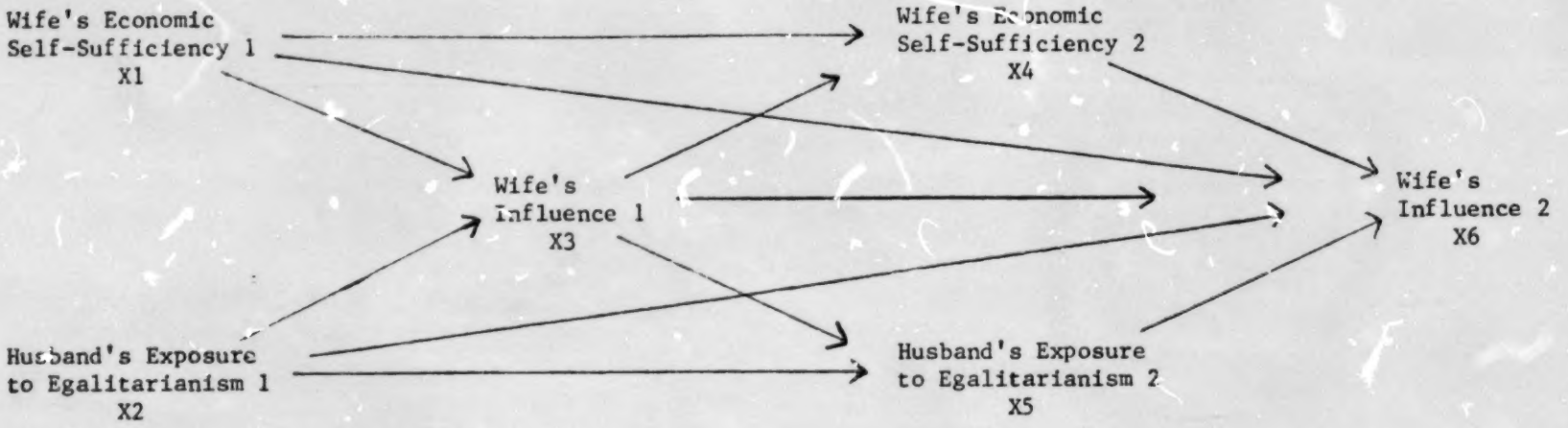
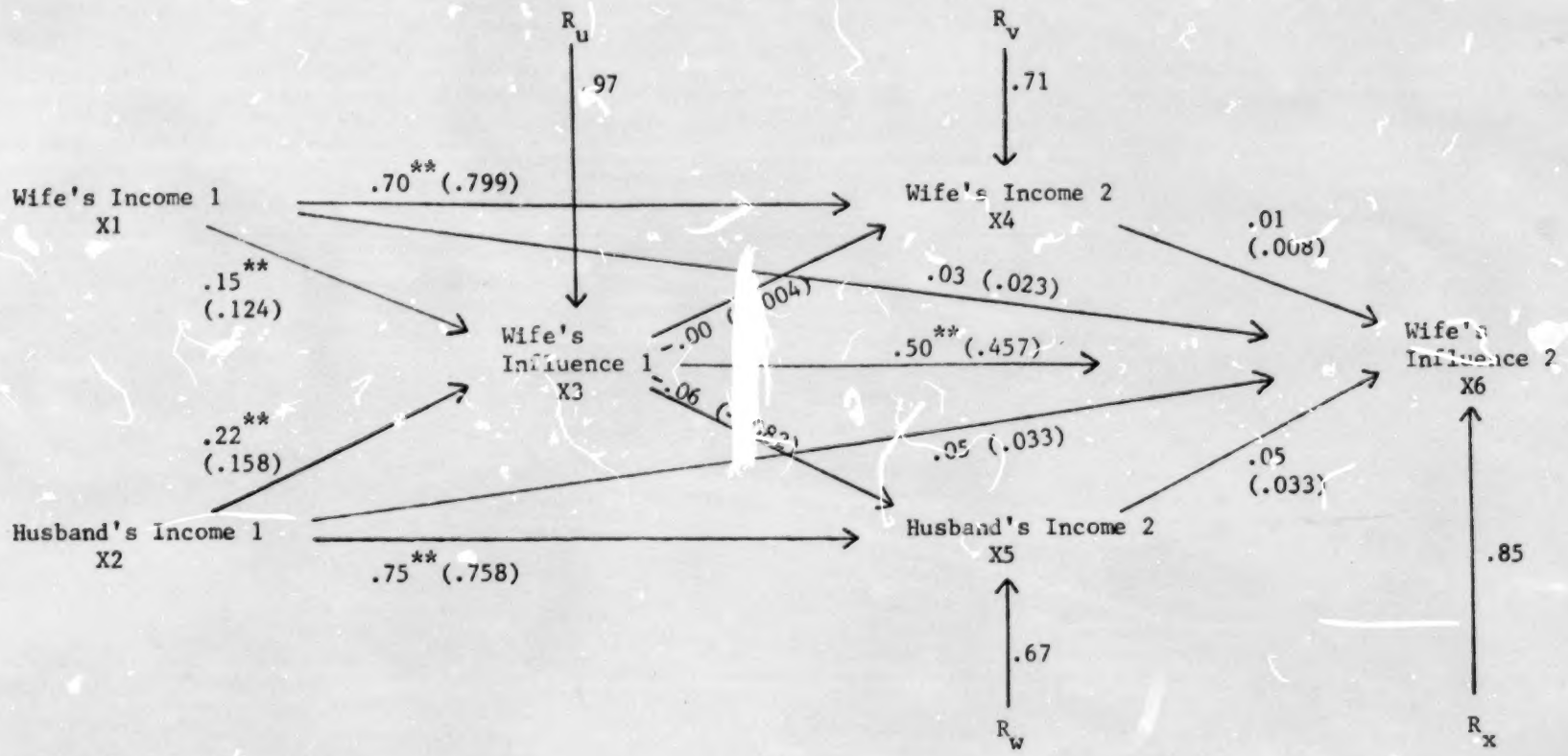
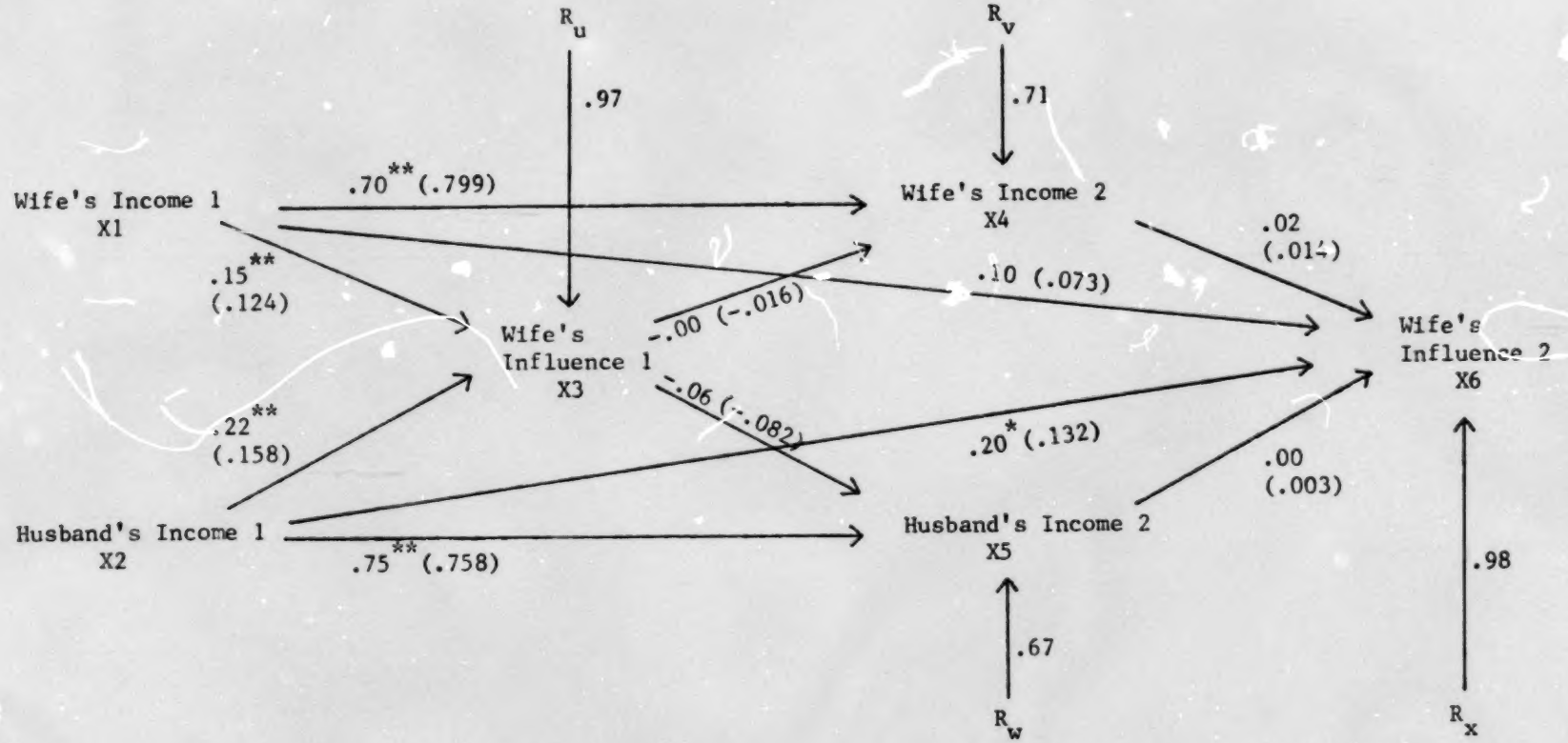

Wife's Economic Self-Sufficiency 1 X1
Wife's Economic Self-Sufficiency 2 X4
Wife's Influence 1 X3
Wife's Influence 2 X6
Husband's Exposure to Egalitarianism 1 X2
Husband's Exposure to Egalitarianism 2 X5

FIGURE 2. Path Diagram of Marital Influence Model



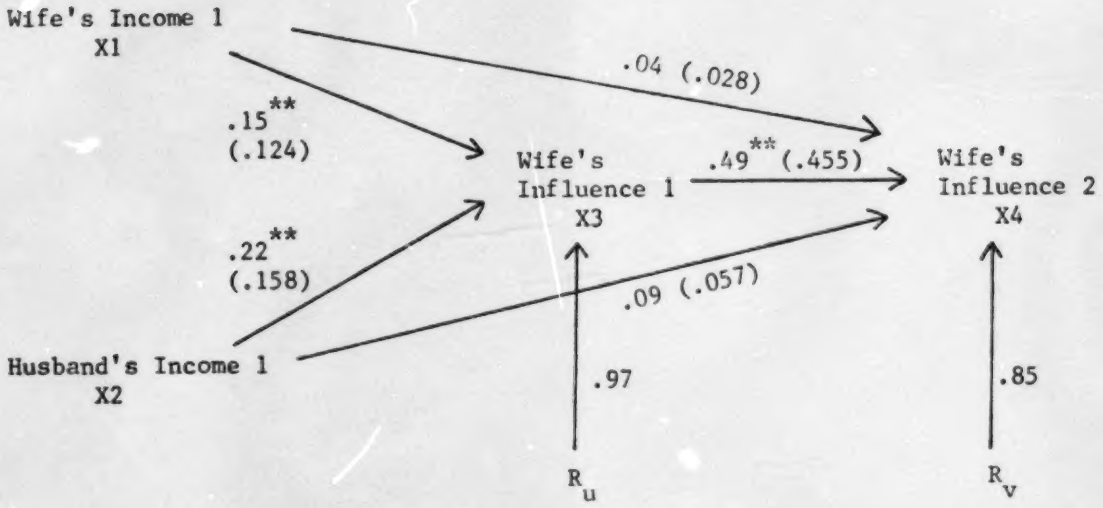
**significant at the .01 level
Unstandardized coefficients in parentheses

FIGURE 3. Path Diagram of Modified Marital Influence Model



**significant at the .01 level
*significant at the .05 level
Unstandardized coefficients in parentheses

FIGURE 4. Path Diagram of Carry Over Model



**significant at the .01 level
Unstandardized coefficients in parentheses

APPENDIX A. Zero-Order Correlation Coefficients

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	Mean	S.D.
Wife's Income 1 (1)		-.11	.70	-.13	.13	.09	.88	1.15
Husband's Income 1 (2)			-.14	.74	.20	.18	3.67	1.32
Wife's Income 2 (3)				-.14	.09	.06	.90	1.31
Husband's Income 2 (4)					.10	.13	4.18	1.33
Wife's Influence 1 (5)						.53	3.34	.94
Wife's Influence 2 (6)							3.44	.87